

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CENTER FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

120 West Tenth ▪ Topeka, Kansas 66612-1291 ▪ 913/296-3251
FAX #913/296-1005

KANSAS MUSEUM OF HISTORY

6425 South West Sixth ▪ Topeka, Kansas 66615-1099 ▪ 913/272-8681

Certification of State Register Listing

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: **NHRA (SRCA) DRAG STRIP**
Address: **GREAT BEND EXPO AREA, WEST 10TH STREET, GREAT BEND, KS**
County: **BARTON COUNTY**
Legal: **MAIN RUNWAY MEASURING 150' X 7999' CONTAINED IN THE
NW4, 34-19S-14W**
Owner: **CITY OF GREAT BEND**
Address: **BOX 1168, GREAT BEND, KS 67530**

National Register eligible _____

State Register eligible XXX

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on **AUGUST 20, 1994**.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.


State Historic Preservation Officer

Date Aug. 23, 1994

The National Hot Rod Association (Sunflower Rod and Custom Association) Drag Strip (c. 1942-1943) is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places for its historical significance as the location of the first NHRA national drag race championships. The drag strip is located at the Great Bend Expo area west of town, and was originally built by the army as an air field during World War II. The concrete airfield measures 150 feet wide by 7999 feet long, a quarter-mile of that length was used for the actual races with the remainder used for straight-of-way.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration allocated one million dollars for the construction of the Great Bend Air Base in September 1942. Construction on the air field began in December 1942 and was concluded in spring 1943. United States Army troops began arriving at the air base in February 1943, in July B-26 bombers arrived at the air base followed by many more troops in August. The base was slated for commercial use after the war in October 1944 and in 1946 the army declared the air base surplus, the City of Great Bend purchased the base in October 1946.

The Sunflower Rod and Custom Association (SRCA) was founded in Great Bend in January 1954. Under the auspices of the city the drag racing club used the air field as their drag strip. The club was incorporated in April 1955, instituting Earl McDonald as president, Leroy Foos as vice-president, Dale Swalander as secretary, and Virginia Belcher as treasurer. The Sunflower Rod and Custom Association also joined the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) in April 1955. This membership gave the club prestige, drag insurance and advertisement through the NHRA's Hot Rod magazine. NHRA was organized in 1951 and had 35,000 members in 1955.

In Spring 1955 the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of the SRCA wrote Wally Parks, president of the NHRA requesting that the NHRA hold the first national quarter mile speed trials in Great Bend later that year. The NHRA responded positively; the drag race would establish the official national acceleration records for the stand and start quarter mile.

Since its inception, the NHRA had established an active Drag Safari that staged regional championships across the country. The safari was a traveling crew of NHRA officials headed by a former police officer, Bud Coons. In 1955, the safari was working its ways toward the national championship event in Great Bend, conducting eighteen weeks of regional championships with thirty car class categories.

The first NHRA national drag race championship occurred in Great Bend between September 29 and October 2, 1955. The event was sponsored by the NHRA in cooperation with Socony Mobil Oil Company, 219 cars competed in front of more than 15,000 spectators. The schedule of events included two days of qualifying runs, one day of elimination runs, and then two-way national record runs for all classes on the last day. Unrelenting rain canceled the two-way national record runs, trophies were awarded to those drivers with the fastest speeds in the elimination runs.

The competition included NHRA's regular twenty-seven division of Gas Coupe/Sedans, Altered Coupe/Sedans, Fuel Coupe/Sedans, Competition Coupe/Sedans, Street Roadsters, Roadsters, Hot Roadsters, Modified Roadsters, Open Gas, Dragsters and Stock Cars, plus one class of Four-Bangers and two gas-powered Sports Cars.

Some of nation's top automotive engineers travelled to Great Bend to observe the races. One of the main features of the four-day event were the attempts made by several of the fastest machines to exceed the kilometer standing start speed records set by the German Auto Union's Porsche designed roadster on the Autobahn in 1937.

The top speed on the first day's qualifying was turned in by Art Chrisman of Compton, California, he piloted his gold dragster across the speed traps at 145.16 miles per hour. Lloyd Scott of Long Beach, California set a new record speed for American drag racing during the elimination runs, pushing his twin-engined Bustle-Bomb to 151 miles per hour.

"For those whose lives have never been touched by a double overhead camshaft or milled head, it may be difficult to understand how oil company executives could be teamed up with these speed crazy kids.....they build hot rods out of miscellaneous parts of new and old cars, using large amounts of American ingenuity to improve on Detroit's products. Then they gather on drag strips, off-the-highway paved surfaces that may be an airport runway or other controlled straightway to compete against each other under stringently observed rules." (Socony Mobil ad, n.d.)

The NHRA held its first national championships in Great Bend for only the first year, choosing not to return to the concrete air field as black-top was identified as a safer surface. Subsequently the airfield has been the site of other national, regional and local competitions and championships.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Great Bend Tribune; 24 September 1942, 17 December 1942, 14 January 1943, 27 February 1943, 19 May 1943, 30 July 1943, 26 December 1944, 8 October 1946, 16 October 1946, 24 October 1946.

Collier, Kent (Secretary-Manager, Great Bend Chamber of Commerce) to Wally Parks (President, National Hot Rod Association), correspondence; 29 April 1955, 12 May 1955, 23 May 1955, 4 June 1955, 14 June 1955.

Sunflower Rod and Custom Association. Bound volume of clipping, letters, advertisements, business cards. (1955-1963)

Hot Rod Magazine. September 1955.

To Great Bend
(1.5 miles)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION OF WESTPORT II

A tract of real estate situated in Sections 33 & 34, Township 19 South, Range 14 West and Sections 3 & 4, Township 20 South, Range 14 West of the Sixth Principal Meridian, Barton County, Kansas and described by metes and bounds as follows:

Commencing at the northwest corner of said Section 34; thence S 00°34'15" E a distance of 60.00 ft to the south right-of-way line of F.A.S. Road 462 and the POINT OF BEGINNING;

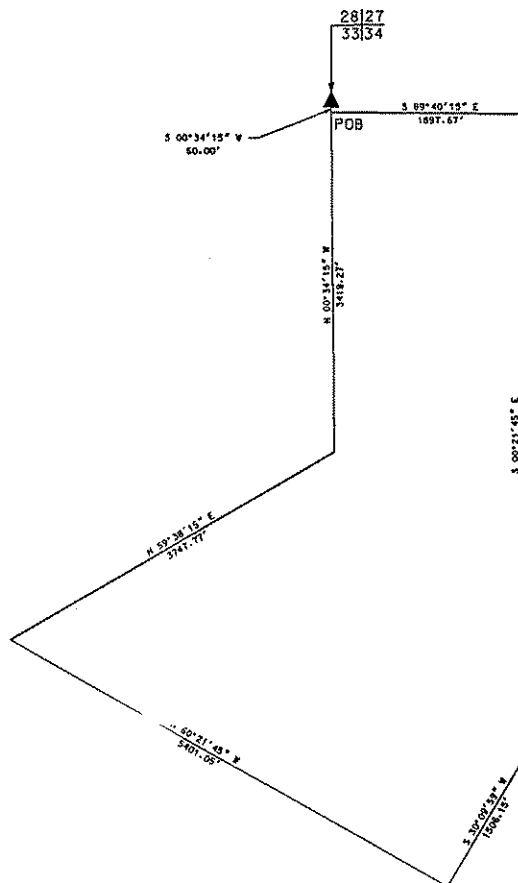
thence following said right-of-way line at a bearing of S89°40'15" E, a distance of 1897.67 ft;

thence S 00°21'45" E, parallel with the centerline of Runway 17-35 and along the Building Restriction Line for said runway, a distance of 6493.39 ft; thence continuing along said Building Restriction Line S 30°09'59" W, a distance of 1506.15 ft;

thence N 60°21'45" W, parallel with the centerline of Runway 11-29 and along the Building Restriction Line for said runway, a distance of 5041.05 ft to the southern edge of pavement of the abandoned runway;

thence N 59°38'15" E, along the edge of said pavement a distance of 3747.77 ft to the west line of said Section 34; thence N 00°34'15" W, a distance of 3419.27 ft along said west line and to the POINT OF BEGINNING.

The above described tract of real estate contains 458 acres more or less.



Notes

Westport Industrial Park

Westport II Industrial Park

BESTEC

Airport Entrance

revision no. | by | date

CITY OF
Great Bend, Ks
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
1209 WILLIAMS BOX 1168 - 67530

project no. 6501-93 | contract no.

MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
SITE MAP

dgn file: AIRPORT.EDA | drawn by: NJD
ref file: | date: 1-6-93
checked by: | date:

scale NO SCALE
sheet of sheets

To US-56
Highway
(1.25 miles)

To A.T. & S.F.
Railroad

SECTION CORNER
31.2
01.4

SECTION CORNER
341.33
31.2

PAVING COUNTY ROAD 7, A.B. 2016

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

To K-98
Highway
(4 miles)

SECTION CORNER
81.22
331.34

PAVED COUNTY ROAD P.A.D. 162



PAVED COUNTY ROAD P.A.D. 162

Flood Control Levee Line

Flood Control
Levee

Crosswind Runway (Nonprecision)
75' x 4698'

Main Runway (Precision-ILS)
150' x 7999'

To US-56
Highway
(1.5 miles)

SECTION CORNER
41.22
331.34

To Great Bend
(1.5 miles)

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A tract of real estate situated in Sections 33 & 34, Township 19 South, Range 14 West and Sections 3 & 4, Township 20 South, Range 14 West of the Sixth Principal Meridian, Barton County, Kansas and described by metes and bounds as follows:

Commencing at the northwest corner of said Section 34; thence S 00°34'15" E a distance of 60.00 ft to the south right-of-way line of F.A.S. Road 462 and the POINT OF BEGINNING;

thence following said right-of-way line at a bearing of S89°40'15" E, a distance of 1897.67 ft;

thence S 00°21'45" E, parallel with the centerline of Runway 17-35 and along the Building Restriction Line for said runway, a distance of 6493.39 ft;

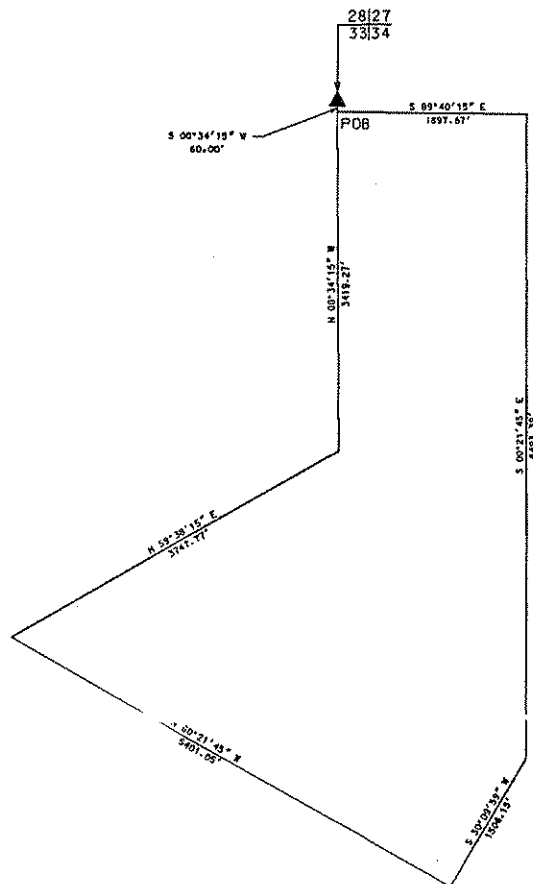
thence continuing along said Building Restriction Line S 30°09'59" W, a distance of 1506.15 ft;

thence N 60°21'45" W, parallel with the centerline of Runway 11-29 and along the Building Restriction Line for said runway, a distance of 5041.05 ft to the southern edge of pavement of the abandoned runway;

thence N 59°38'15" E, along the edge of said pavement a distance of 3747.77 ft to the west line of said Section 34;

thence N 00°34'15" W, a distance of 3419.27 ft along said west line and to the POINT OF BEGINNING.

The above described tract of real estate contains 458 acres more or less.



Notes



Westport Industrial Park



Westport II Industrial Park



BESTEC



Airport Entrance



Airport Entrance

revision no. | by | date

CITY OF

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ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

1209 WILLIAMS BOX 1168 - 67530

project no.

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6501-93

MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
SITE MAP

dgn file: AIRPORT.EDA; drawn by: MJD

ref file:

date: 1/6/93

checked by:

date:

scale: HD SCALE

sheet of sheets

To US-56
Highway
(1.25 miles)

To A.T. & S.F.
Railroad

SECTION CORNER
34/35
312

SECTION CORNER
34/35
312

FAVOR COUNTY ROAD
F.A.S. 462

ON ZONING MAP

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

To K-96
Highway
(4 miles)

SECTION CORNER
28.17
331.34

PAVED COUNTY ROAD P.A.S. 162



PAVED COUNTY ROAD P.A.S. 162

Flood Control Levee Line

Flood Control
Levee

Crosswind Runway (Nonprecision)
75' x 4698'

Main Runway (Precision ILS)
150' x 7999'

To US-56
Highway
(1.5 miles)

SECTION CORNER
41.3
281.6